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How I Start Teaching AI to Middle and High Schoolers

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How I Start Teaching AI to Middle and High Schoolers

By Vicki Davis   January 10, 2024   Subscribe to the 10 Minute Teacher Podcast

When we start discussing AI, they don't know it. Some teachers are curious about how to teach about AI. Maybe this glimpse into the resources and methods I use with my 9th graders (and later in the semester, 8th grade) will give you some ideas. You won't find this in a textbook (yet), but there are some excellent resources if you're looking. While I have released a full podcast on how I'm using AI in my classroom, let's start simple with free resources that can be taught anywhere by just about anyone.
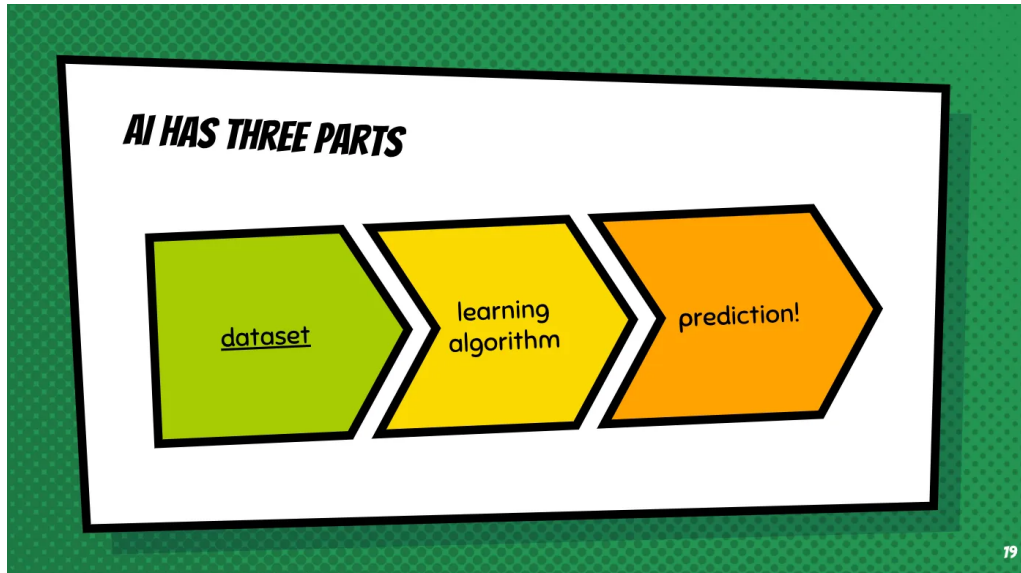
I did this with my 9th graders yesterday, less than 24 hours ago. I hope it helps some of you get started. You can do this. Don't be afraid. The conversations will inspire and excite you, engage your students in positive uses of AI, and steer them away from the negative. Let's go!

Introducing Data Sets in AI

We start with Quick Draw with Google. Students load the website on their personal devices, draw different images, and see if the machine can guess the image within 20 seconds.

Teaching About Machine Learning and AI

Immediately after that, we started discussing data sets and machine learning and how it works. I ask students what this is part of, and eventually, they will mention that it is part of AI. I will pull up a few slides from the first slide deck of the MIT Middle School AI curriculum and talk about datasets.

What Students Say About AI

We will then discuss why AI has gotten bad press in the media, and they will answer:

Kids are using AI to cheat

AI will keep us from learning

AI is a problem and can replace humans.

And there we are, on the topic that is front of mind and front of conversation. I do believe that schools that won't or don't discuss AI with faculty and kids are having kids make up their minds about what they think. (As I shared in my 3-part series "Why Every School Needs an AI Policy Right Now," which included 8 important Generative use Cases of AI in the classroom.) Typically, conversations in middle school locker rooms and hallways don't end up with the best long-term decisions, I don't think. Do they?

So, we become part of the conversation.

Teaching About AI Data Sets and Video Deep Fakes

So, then I showed an America's Got Talent finale where "Elvis" (using deep fake technology) sang with Simon Cowell:

Then, we discuss what the data set must have been that they used to train "Elvis" to be put over the face of the singer (who had a similar facial structure.)

Licensing of Deep Fake is helping Bruce Willis's family.

Then, we discuss how Bruce Willis was the first movie star to license his deep fake for a "digital twin." Bruce Willis has a degenerative disease and this is quite an impressive way to take care of his family in the future (as well as give us a few more Die Hards to watch at Christmas?)

Now, at this point, I was done with the first day of class, and students were ready to talk.

Understanding the Reality Gap and Our Inability to Detect Fakes

Today, they'll walk into class, and I'll have faces on the board and ask them to tell who is real. I usually have generated these in This Person does Not Exist, however this year, I'm using the faces generated by PhotoShop from last semester's class.

Teach about AI: Start Now! You Can Do It!

The kids are eager to talk. Yes, they are. This is such a broad topic and is changing rapidly, but I won't let all that I don't know keep me from sharing what I do know. I do know that AI is a tool

that can be used for great good, and the effective supervision and use of AI is part of what my students will need to use and do in the future. It is worth giving the first day of class to start the conversation.

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VICKI DAVIS

Vicki Davis is a full-time classroom teacher and IT Director in Georgia, USA. She is Mom of three, wife of one, and loves talking about the wise, transformational use of technology for teaching and doing good in the world. She hosts the 10 Minute Teacher Podcast which interviews teachers around the world about remarkable classroom practices to inspire and help teachers. Vicki focuses on what unites us -- a quest for truly remarkable life-changing teaching and learning. The goal of her work is to provide actionable, encouraging, relevant ideas for teachers that are grounded in the truth and shared with love. Vicki has been teaching since 2002 and blogging since 2005. Vicki has spoken around the world to inspire and help teachers reach their students. She is passionate about